

Objectives

- Explain why consumer spending increased.
- Discuss postwar changes in family life.
- Describe the rise of new forms of mass culture.



Terms and People

- **consumerism** – large-scale buying, much of it on credit
- **median family income** – measure of average family income
- **nuclear family** – ideal or typical household with a father, mother, and children

Terms and People (continued)

- **Benjamin Spock** – influential author of 1946 *Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*
- **rock-and-roll** – music originated in the gospel and blues traditions of African Americans
- **Elvis Presley** – iconic American singer whose success sparked the popularity of rock-and-roll music in the 1950s



How did popular culture and family life change during the 1950s?

During the 1950s, the ideal family consisted of a “breadwinning” father and a mother who stayed home to raise children.

The growing influence of television and radio helped shape the social and economic changes of the times.

As the U.S. economy began to boom in the postwar era, Americans were caught up in a wave of **consumerism.**

- During the 1950s, **median family income** rose, so **Americans** had more money to spend.
- Companies introduced **credit cards** and encouraged **buying on credit**.
- **Supermarkets and shopping centers** sprouted, and shopping became a new pastime.



Home appliances topped the list of the goods that Americans bought.



Washing machines, dryers, refrigerators, and stoves transformed housework by lessening its physical demands.

Americans bought televisions in record numbers, and by the end of the 1950s, 90 percent of all U.S. households owned one.

During World War II, many women—including married women with children—had worked in factories.

But when the war ended, most women returned to being homemakers, which is what society expected of them at that time.

Women who wanted a career outside the home faced social pressure to rethink their decision.

Society stressed the importance of the **nuclear family**.

Magazines, TV shows, and movies reinforced the image of the “ideal” American homemaker.



But as the 1950s progressed, more women were willing to challenge the view that women should not have careers outside the home.

By 1960, women held one-third of the nation's jobs, and half of these women workers were married.





More so than in the past, family life revolved around children.

- The best-selling book of the era was Dr. **Benjamin Spock**'s *Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*, which stressed nurturing.
- Parents spent a great deal of money on clothes, toys, and other items for their children.
- Baby boomer teens had an even greater impact on the economy.

1950s Religious Revival in the United States



Religious Groups and Churches

- Organized religious groups became more powerful, more churches were built, and evangelists attracted large live and TV audiences.
- Regular church attendance rose.

Acts of Congress

- Congress added “In God We Trust” to the dollar bill and “under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance to underscore the contrast between America and atheist communist societies.

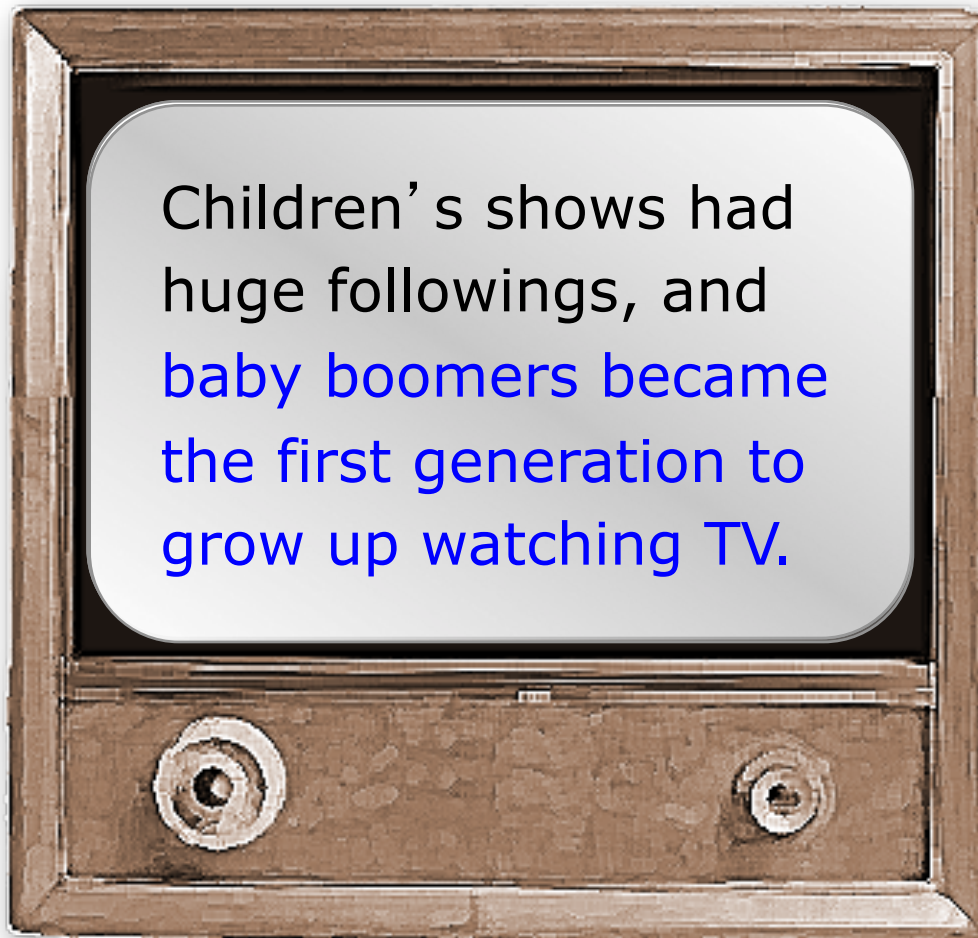


By 1960, the wide-spread distribution of **Dr. Jonas Salk's polio vaccine** had nearly eliminated the disease.

At the same time, **antibiotics came into wide use**, helping to control numerous infectious diseases.

These medical advances, plus a better diet, increased children's life expectancy.

Sales of TVs skyrocketed during the 1950s.

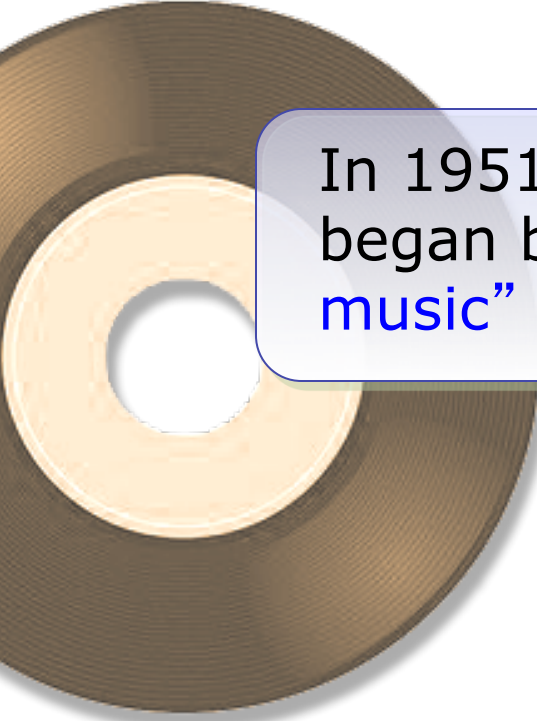


Children's shows had huge followings, and baby boomers became the first generation to grow up watching TV.

Sitcoms, which reflected 1950s ideals, told the stories of happy families with few real-life problems.

Television, along with radio and movies, helped shape a mass national culture.

- Because Americans were exposed to the same shows and advertisements, **the media helped erode distinct regional and ethnic cultures.**
- Starting with the 1952 presidential campaign, **television changed political campaigns** by allowing citizens to see the candidates in action.



In 1951, a white disc jockey named Alan Freed began broadcasting what had been called “race music” to his Midwestern listeners.

Freed renamed the music
rock-and roll.

**He planted the seed for a
cultural revolution.**



Rock music originated in the rhythm and blues traditions of African Americans.

Whites did not hear many live performances of rhythm and blues because of Jim Crow laws in the South and subtle segregation in the North.

Through the radio, the music attracted a wider audience in the postwar era.

In the early 1950s, Sam Phillips set up a recording studio in Memphis to record African American blues performers.



Phillips signed **Elvis Presley**, who became the first rock-and-roll idol, sold millions of records, and set off the new rock craze.



Although rock-and-roll came to symbolize youth culture, not everyone liked the music.

- Elvis' performance on the Ed Sullivan show **shocked many adults.**
- **Ministers complained** about the passions rock music seemed to unleash among teens.
- **Congress held hearings** on the subversive nature of rock music.

Section Review

QuickTake Quiz



Know It, Show It Quiz

